A critical safety net

Report of the key findings from a survey of small and faith-based organisations addressing homelessness

September 2019
Introduction

As part of the MHCLG work plan Homeless Link was asked to work in partnership with Housing Justice on a project focusing on small, community and faith-based organisations. The first part of this work involved developing a questionnaire survey for small, community and faith-based organisations. The aim of the survey was to better understand who these organisations are; their views on the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy and Initiatives; and to gauge how involved they are at a local level in partnership working; the challenges and opportunities they are facing; and how they perceive their role in ending rough sleeping and homelessness.

The survey was developed by Homeless Link and revised by the project Advisory Group and piloted by a number of organisations via Housing Justice. The survey was sent out via Homeless Link and Housing Justice’s membership, as well as being promoted on the Homeless Link website and via social media to try and encourage as many responses as possible. The survey was open from 5 June to 24 June 2019.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the individuals and organisations who gave up their time to complete the survey.

We have chosen to call the report ‘A critical safety net’ to reflect the invaluable role that small, community and faith-based groups are playing in our communities to support individuals facing homelessness and rough sleeping, often filling the gaps with vital support when other services are unable to help.

Section A: About you and your organisation

Respondents

A total of 279 surveys were completed. The respondents to the survey were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid member of staff</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy/ Religious Leader</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The survey was targeted at organisations with a turnover of under £1million.
Region

Responses were received from the regions as set out in the graph below.

The regions with most responses received are London (27%) and the South East (25%) and the lowest responses were received from the North East (2% - 3 responses).

Type of Organisation

Responses were received from the following organisations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What best describes your organisation?</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A religious worship venue</td>
<td>11% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A faith-based charity/organisation</td>
<td>47% (130)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A non faith-based community organisation/charity</td>
<td>33% (91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9% (25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly half of the respondents described their organisation as a faith-based charity/ organisation and over a third of respondents were from non-faith-based community organisation/ charity. The Other categories included the following: mixture of faith based and non-faith/community organisation (11); faith-based and worship venue (2); charity for refugees and migrants (1); homeless charity/ supported housing (3).

What services do you offer?

Respondents offered a wide range of services as set out in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services Offer</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help and advice for people facing homelessness</td>
<td>67% (187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency food provision</td>
<td>62% (171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to emergency and temporary accommodation</td>
<td>48% (132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and legal advice</td>
<td>40% (112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance getting into education, employment or training</td>
<td>50% (139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help setting up bank accounts and accessing benefits and support</td>
<td>51% (141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe space</td>
<td>64% (177)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with drug and alcohol dependency</td>
<td>35% (98)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Other category responses include night shelter; signposting; shower and washing facilities/clothing; Health care support including mental health support; Support and advice for asylum seekers, migrants and those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF); coordinating work of homelessness groups/networks; supported housing; support for women experiencing domestic abuse/sexual exploitation; befriending/mentoring; criminal justice/probation support; education and employment support; pre-tenancy training.

What is the particular strength that your organisation brings to helping people who are rough sleeping/ homeless?

The majority of respondents identified that the strength that their organisation brings to helping people who are rough sleeping/ homeless is providing **support and advice**. This includes personalised holistic support; employment, education, skills and training support; non-judgemental support and compassion; relational/emotional support and care; benefits support and advice; and support for those who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)/ EU migrants.

“We are inclusive and do not exclude people who may be dependent upon substances and present as intoxicated, we advocate tirelessly and challenge locally anything that is less than fair or best practice. We recognise that past trauma is the basis for most people that access our service and we provide therapeutic options as well as practical solutions.”

The next most frequently identified strength is **housing advice, support and provision** and this includes help into accommodation; supported housing/hostels; support to access the private rented sector (PRS); and support once people have moved into housing.

The third area of strength identified from the responses is **providing for immediate basic needs** including food/hot meals, washing, personal care, clothes, sleeping bags & blankets.

“By creating a safe space that enables us to build up trust with our clients, we endeavour to work with them through the myriad of problems that they inevitably face. Sometimes it can just be the provision of a hot meal, a shower and change of clothes that can restore a person’s self-belief and give them the strength to face another day.”

The fourth area of strength identified is the **provision of night shelters**.

The fifth most common mentioned area of strength is **signposting to other services/ advocacy**.

Other areas of strength identified in the responses include:

- **Contribution and engagement in partnership working locally.**
  “We help to ensure agencies/ voluntary groups/ local authorities are working well alongside each other meaning better signposting and referral mechanisms for people who are homeless, less confusion and duplicating of provision and hopefully, therefore, a more holistic approach to support. This should mean better access for harder to reach rough sleepers and support for those who are homeless and want to transition into employment or other support.”

- **Offering a safe place and space/ respite**
“People long for a sense of belonging, a place they can relate to and feel safe. At our venues we offer them a safe place to rest and the emotional, social and financial support for their needs, including helping them get into accommodation and sort their problems with ID, banks, etc. During the day we liaise with them, meet them and make appointments on their behalf, give advice and signpost them to the relevant services that can help, such as dealing with their substance use and dependency, life skills to manage their income, getting into employment or taking care of their health.”

- Drop in/ day centre/multi agency hub
- Welcoming environment and trusting relationships.

The main challenges organisations are facing in helping people who are sleeping rough/ homeless

The survey asked respondents to identify the three main current challenges facing their organisation.

| The top three main challenges identified by the survey respondents are: |
| 1. **Increasing complexity of need of individuals that services are working with and lack of support services available to address these needs.** This includes lack of mental health services and drug/alcohol services; lack of supported housing for those with most complex needs; lack of support for dual diagnosis; lack of provision for women; and lack of provision for ex-offenders. |
| 2. **Lack of sustainable long-term funding/ cuts to funding.** |
| 3. **Lack of availability of affordable accommodation for people to move on to.** Under this category there was also specific reference to difficulties accessing the private rented sector accommodation with reference to LHA levels not covering rents, lack of funding for deposits and reluctance of landlords to rent to those on benefits and to engage with services. |

Other challenges identified by a significant number of respondents include:

- **Lack of services and support/ options for those with No Recourse to Public Funds including EU migrants.**
- **Challenges of the benefits system** including issues with Universal Credit and delays; lack of ID and documentation; setting up bank accounts.
- **Growth in demand/ increasing numbers in need of support and help at the same time as a lack of emergency & hostel accommodation/Insufficient bed spaces to meet demand.**
- **Staffing and volunteering capacity/ shortage** including need for staff training.
- **Insufficient partnership/ collaborative working in local area.**

### Section B: The Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy

**Awareness of the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy & Rough Sleeping Initiative**

80% of respondents said they are aware of the Rough Sleeping Strategy and 68% said they are aware of the government funded Rough Sleeping Initiatives. 20% said they are not aware of the Rough Sleeping Strategy and 32% said they are not aware of the Rough Sleeping Initiatives.
Views on the Rough Sleeping Strategy and/or Rough Sleeping Initiatives

Around one third of respondents held positive views on the RS Strategy/Initiative and feel it has made a difference including providing additional funding/resources and encouraging partnership/collaborative working.

“The Rough Sleeping Strategy is ambitious but will only be achieved by bringing everyone on board to address the issue from small charities, faith based groups, large charities and statutory bodies. It also needs continued funding and political will to sustain momentum. The RSI activities in our area have had a positive impact not just on the rough sleeping population but on partnership working across the city.”

A further third of respondents do not think that the Rough Sleeping Strategy and/or RSI sufficiently addresses structural issues/ root causes, e.g. shortage of affordable housing, benefit issues, poverty etc. and impact of Government policies.

“The Rough Sleeping Strategy seems well-intentioned and the team behind it is substantial and credible. The specialist advisors are helpful, responsive and both expert and experienced. However, I believe the strategy to be unachievable without dramatic change in wider Government policy and spending, particularly in relation to drug and alcohol services, and genuinely affordable housing.”

The next most frequent response was that the funding for the Rough Sleeping strategy/ RSI is too-short term and is insufficient.

“The RSI is bringing welcome investment into the sector and we are grateful to have been awarded funding from this programme but the funding timescales are far too short. If the Government wants to fulfil the aspiration of ending rough sleeping by 2027, they need to be designing long-term solutions.”

There was also recognition by a significant number of respondents that they do not know enough about the RS strategy/RSI and there is a need for more communication and information.

The last two main categories of responses identify that they feel the RS strategy/RSI is limited and not ambitious or bold enough and that it does not sufficiently recognise the role/value of small and faith based organisations.

“Big charities are the ones getting the money while small charities and voluntary groups that do more work with the homeless are side-lined and ignored.”

The main gaps in the Rough Sleeping Strategy/ Rough Sleeping Initiative

The top five responses identifying the main gaps in the Rough Sleeping Strategy/ Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) are:

1. They do not tackle the root/ structural causes of rough sleeping or recognise the impact of Government policies on homelessness including lack affordable housing supply, welfare reform, poverty, etc.
2. They have not resulted in an increased availability of services/support for mental health and/or drug/alcohol issues.
3. The need for long-term sustainable funding/under resourced short-term funding.
4. Lack of inclusion of community/faith-based groups in the Rough Sleeping Strategy/RSI.
5. They do not sufficiently recognise or understand the complexity of needs/experience of trauma of people sleeping rough.

Main contribution of your organisation to ending rough sleeping

There were a range of responses provided to this question on the main contribution of organisations to ending rough sleeping. The top six most frequently mentioned contributions in order are:
1. Providing practical/emotional/holistic support and advice.
2. Providing a safe place to stay/emergency & supported accommodation.
3. Signposting to other services/advocacy.
4. Involvement in partnership/collaborative working.
5. Providing employment and training support.
6. Support and/or accommodation for those who are NRPF/rough sleeping migrants.

Section C: Joint working in your local area

As the above table shows approximately two-thirds of respondents are in contact with their local authority on a frequent basis with 46% of respondents in contact on a weekly basis and 20% on a monthly basis. 4% (9 respondents) identified that they had never been in contact with their local authority.
A similar proportion of respondents reported that they were in contact with larger homelessness agencies with approximately two-thirds in contact on a frequent basis. 44% reported they were in contact with larger homelessness agencies in their local area on a weekly basis, and 23% in contact on a monthly basis.

5% (12 respondents) identified that they had never been in contact with larger homelessness agencies in their local area.

**How would you assess partnership working in your local area and how engaged do you feel with it?**

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We feel included &amp; connected with the local strategy on rough sleeping/homelessness</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We feel valued and appreciated for the work we do to support those who are homeless by the local authority</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We work positively with the larger homelessness organisations in our local area</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint partnership working is critical to ending homelessness in our local area</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were also asked how they would you assess partnership working in their local area and how engaged they feel with it.
The majority of respondents assessed partnership working in their local area as positive and they feel well engaged.

“In Plymouth we have moved to an ‘alliance’ contract, bringing together homelessness, drugs and other services. There are good things about that although homelessness services already worked together quite well.”

“We are very fortunate that there is a strong culture of partnership in Nottingham, particularly among small and medium sized voluntary groups. We are currently on a journey with the local authority too and feel increasingly engaged with and valued by the LA which is very welcome.”

The next most frequent response is that partnership working is improving but there is more to do.

“Part of the issue is engaging the smallest organisations such as some soup runs who are not all formalised charities.”

The third most frequent response is that there is close partnership working with other charities and churches but not with the Local Authority or Statutory Services, with many specifically referencing mental health services.

“The consistent buy in from mental health services is still a key missing piece to helping with solutions.”

Around 12% of respondents assess partnership working as poor or reducing and report not feeling engaged. Examples of particular issues raised include: small organisations feeling excluded due to size; tensions between agencies and council related to lack of access to hostels and accommodation; impact of restructuring and staffing changes in local authorities make it difficult to build lasting partnerships; competitive commissioning working against partnership working; RSI funding has impacted on partnership working; prejudice from other organisations due to being faith based; domination of a few larger agencies.

“I feel that the intention to work in partnership is there, however, the commissioning and funding of services can pitch organisations against each other, often times funding a duplicate service at the expense of the pre-established services, making collaborative approaches a bit tricky, however this needs to be tackled as it is the only way forward.”

If your local authority could do one thing to improve the situation for people who are rough sleeping/ homeless what would it be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This table lists the six main areas respondents identified as the main thing local authorities could do to improve the situation for people who are rough sleeping/ homeless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Increase availability of affordable housing for move on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Provide more temporary/hostel/ supported housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Improve partnership/ collaborative working and to include small and faith-based organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Long term sustainable funding for services, especially revenue funding for support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Permanent/all year round shelters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Increase in availability of support services/provision for those with complex needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If the Government could do one thing to improve the situation for people who are rough sleeping/homeless, what would it be?

Below are the top six responses from the survey starting with the most frequently mentioned:

1. **Longer term sustainable funding for services**
2. **Increase the supply of affordable housing.**
3. **Improve the benefits system (esp. Universal Credit) including making it easier to access benefits** and responses also included reviewing the Housing Benefit rules for supported housing and the levels of Local Housing Allowance being insufficient to cover rents.
4. **Increase provision of hostels and emergency accommodation.**
5. **Increase availability of support provision for those with complex needs**
6. **Invest in Housing First**

In what ways could Homeless Link and/or Housing Justice help you?

This table sets out the seven main areas where respondents feel that Homeless Link and Housing Justice can help small community and faith-based organisations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Campaigning for policy change / national voice for local organisations with Government. Specific reference was made to campaigning for more homes; NRPF (including asylum seekers having permission to work); more investment in and provision of mental health services; sustainable long-term funding for homelessness services.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Training with specific reference made to affordable training for small orgs; free training (esp. for volunteers); trustee training; training outside of London; on-line courses; training on NRPF; safeguarding training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Funding Support and this included HL and HJ providing financial help/grants; sharing information on funding opportunities and sources of funding; support for funding bids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Information and advice especially in relation to legislation and policy changes with specific reference to governance; benefit rules and changes; landlord law; NRPF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sharing good practice and increased opportunities for learning, e.g. good practice events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Networking and coordinating – linking organisations together/ facilitating forums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Champion and advocate for recognition of the value and contribution made by small, community and faith-based organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contact details for each organisation:

**Housing Justice:**
https://www.housingjustice.org.uk  020 3544 8094

**Homeless Link:**
https://www.homeless.org.uk  020 7840 4430
Any other comments about the role of small and faith-based organisations in ending rough sleeping/homelessness?

On asking for further comments at the end of the survey the top five most frequent responses are:

1. The need for greater recognition and valuing the vital role small community and faith-based organisations play in supporting people who are homeless (by Government, Local Authorities and larger homelessness charities)

“It seems to me that the faith sector is playing an absolutely vital role in providing the ‘last line of defence’ when it comes to supporting homeless people into recovery. “

“We always have had a role to play and however the landscape changes, this will always continue. It is great that statutory services are beginning to embrace the role we do have to play and treat us as equal partners. This breeds trust and positive relationship building which is vital to create seamless systems that work for our clients.”

2. Small and faith-based organisations having more trusted relationships, more personalised approach and flexibility in responding to needs of rough sleepers.

“The grassroots organisations are the ones who know best the individuals that need help. They are best placed to deliver tailor made services with a personal approach whereas there is a wariness of statutory services among service users.”

“We provide a sticking plaster on the wound of homelessness by providing a hot meal as well as friendship and often prayer. It encourages and enables people to keep going. It may not be monumental but I am sure it makes a difference in someone’s life and the relationships that are built up are often ones of trust which we could make better use of coming alongside people and enabling them to take steps forward.”

3. Small community and faith-based organisations are filling the gaps due to cuts in services/LA and Government avoiding their responsibility.

“We are picking up the pieces and filling the gaps where statutory services have experienced cuts. The competition and work load it takes to apply for funding is unhelpful and for a small charity takes us away from delivering services.”

“I feel they are critical in filling the gaps that main service providers are not able to fill. In particular working with clients with dual diagnosis who find it very difficult to access appropriate MH support because they use substances and also have difficulty in keeping a tenancy be that within a hostel setting, temporary accommodation or within a private or council property.”

4. Importance of partnership/collaborative working and involving small community and faith-based organisations.

“More needs to be done to bring coalitions and partnerships of smaller organisations together so that we can bring a more strategic approach to our service delivery.”
“It’s a collaborative approach. We need to pull the best from the public, private, VCSE and faith-based sectors and wrap the services around the individual.”

5. Funding – more longer-term funding needs to be available that can be easier to access for small and faith-based organisations.

“Longer term funding is needed, as working from month to month not knowing what will happen provides limitations to service delivery, staffing, recruitment and so on.”

“Small and faith-based organisations work hard and meet needs at a fraction of the cost with many volunteers and dedicated people but are starved of funding and seen as the poor relation - if they were properly funded, respected and supported to build capacity they would be even more effective.”